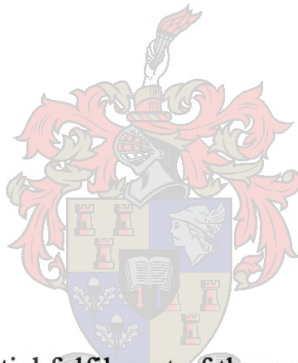


**SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES
FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF
THE RURAL PARENT GOVERNORS AND SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
IN THE VRYHEID REGION**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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Date: 20 November 2002

ABSTRACT

The 1996 South African Schools Act witnessed a growth of local democratic influence on school governance throughout the country. The system of school governance in South Africa has undergone recent changes through this Act which, in effect, ensured that each school had its own governing body and took the first steps to standardise membership to include educators, non-educator staff, learners (in grade 8 or above) and parents.

Despite the appropriateness of parental representation, there are still misunderstandings, confusion and conflicts with regard to the role of parent governors in democratic school governance. The rationale behind this study was to reveal both parent governors' and principals' perceptions of the powers and responsibilities allocated by the South African Schools Act of 1996 to each stakeholder group of the SGB.

The writer of this study was an educator, resident in Vryheid and with significant first-hand teaching experience in schools in rural and semi-rural areas of the region, as well as experience as a member of an SGB. This experience has made him keenly aware that perceptions play an important role in participative school governance. The purpose of the research was therefore to investigate parent governors' as well as principals' perceptions of their role and responsibilities in democratic school governance.

This study followed literature study as well as empirical investigation in revealing parent governors' and principals' perspectives of SGBs. A literature study provided the basis for analysis and clarification of important concepts. Another perspective was gained by an empirical study of a sample of fifteen schools in the rural areas of the Vryheid region.

The findings led to the conclusion that SGBs were widely accepted as legitimate and worthwhile structures but there were specific important needs for training and capacity-building. The findings also revealed that parents in rural areas appear to find it very difficult to become involved in educational life of schools and are especially reluctant to

serve on SGBs. Reasons for this apparent apathy were found to lie in problems of illiteracy and feelings of ignorance and inferiority.

These conclusions enabled the researcher to make specific recommendations for improving the role and functioning of SGBs. Recommendations were made for improving the role of parent governors and principals as well as for capacity-building relating to the needs of each stakeholder group. A particular emphasis of these unique needs of rural communities should be met. This was seen as a priority in order to improve education in these historically underdeveloped areas and in so doing promote the growth of democratic school governance in the rural areas of the Vryheid region.

OPSOMMING

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Skolewet van 1996 het die weg gebaan vir die groei van plaaslike, demokratiese invloed op skoolbeheer dwarsdeur die land. Die stelsel van skoolbeheer in Suid-Afrika het onlangs veranderings ondergaan deur middel van hierdie wet, wat by implikasie, verseker het dat elke skool sy eie Skoolbeheerliggaam (SBL) verkry het en die eerste stappe gebaan om lidmaatskap te standaardiseer, ten einde opvoeders, nie-opvoederpersoneel, leerders (graad agt en hoër) en ouers in te sluit.

Ten spyte van die paslikheid van ouerverteenwoordiging, is daar nog wanpersepsies, verwarring en konflikte met betrekking tot die rol van ouerbeheerliggaamlede in demokratiese skoolbestuur. Die rasionaal vir hierdie studie was om die persepsies van beide ouerbeheerliggaamlede en skoolhoofde, rakende die gesag en verantwoordelike wat die SA Skolewet van 1996 aan elke belangegroep binne die SBL toegeken het, bloot te lê.

Die outeur van hierdie studie was 'n opvoeder, gevestig in Vryheid, en met aansienlike, eerstehandse onderwyservaring van plattelandse en semi-plattelandse streke in die gebied, sowel as ervaring as 'n lid van 'n SBL. Hierdie ervaring het hom intens bewus gemaak dat die persepsies 'n beklangrike rol in skoolbeheer speel. Die doel van hierdie navorsing was dus om ouerbeheerliggaamlede sowel as skoolhoofde se persepsies en hul rol binne demokratiese skoolbestuur te ondersoek.

Hierdie studie het gebruik gemaak van literatuurstudie sowel as empiriese ondersoek om die persepsies van skoolbeheerliggaamlede en skoolhoofde rakende SBL te bloot te lê. 'n Literatuurstudie het die basis verskaf vir die analise en verheldering van belangrike konsepte. 'n Verdere perspektief is verkry deur 'n empiriese studie van 'n steekproef bestaande uit 15 skole in die Vryheid-gebied. Uit die bevindinge is daar tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat SBL oor 'n wye spektrum as legitieme en waardevolle strukture aanvaar is, maar daar was spesifieke, belangrike knelpunte wat opleiding en kapasiteit noodsaak. Die bevindinge het ook getoon dat ouers in plattelandse gebiede dit blykbaar moeilik vind om by die onderwyslewe van skole betroke te raak en veral

teësinning is om in die SBL te dien. Daar is bevind dat hierdie oënskynlike apatie gesetel is in probleme soos geletterdheid en gevoelens soos onkunde en minderwaardigheid.

Hierdie gevolgtrekkings het die navorser in staat gestel om spesifieke aanbevelings vir die verbetering van die rol en funksionering van SBL te maak. Verdere aanbevelings is gemaak om die rol van ouerbeheerliggaamlede en skoolhoofde, sowel as die bou van kapasiteit, verwant aan die behoeftes van elke belangegroep, te verbeter. 'n Besondere nadruk van hierdie aanbeveling was om te vind waarvolgens die unieke behoeftes van plaaslike gemeenskappe aangespreek kan word. Dit is as 'n prioriteit beskou ten einde onderwys in hierdie histories-ontwikkelde streke te verbeter en deur middel daarvan, die groei van demokratiese skoolbeheer in die plaaslike streke van die Vryheid-gebied te bevorder.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to :

My beloved wife, Thandile Mercy (okaMntungwa), who has played the role of a motivator, a supporter, and above all, a person whom I admire and love for her courage.

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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXTUALISATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is not a new phenomenon in our education system. Before the passing and implementation of the South African Schools Act in 1996, the school committees or management councils provided parents with the opportunity to introduce representative governance of schools. While some school committees took an active and day-to-day interest, many of them did not take the job seriously, and left the running of schools to often incompetent, sometimes corrupt, principals. The vague definition of duties left the power in schools very much in the hands of the principal (Gann,1998:15). The voice of the community, the voice of the ordinary people who pay for education through their rates and taxes had rarely been heard until 1997 when the first democratic school governing bodies were elected in accordance with the South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (RSA,1996).

The passing of the South African Schools Act in 1996 has been a positive move towards proper representative governance in schools. This Act includes the idea that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, learners and other members of the community must democratically participate in the activities of the school. The governing body is now expected to make decisions on behalf of the school and to see to it that the school is administered properly. For the first time in their history, school governing bodies have a range of duties set down for them by the South African Schools Act of 1996. School governing bodies now carry the legal responsibility for a number of new activities within the school. While there is evidence to show that some school principals are willing to share these responsibilities (McPherson and Dlamini 1998:17), the question remains whether school governing bodies are adequately trained to carry these legal responsibilities.

In this research project an investigation to establish the roles, responsibilities and the rights of school governing bodies is conducted. This work is an attempt to disclose the school governing bodies' real perceptions, feelings and aspirations about their new roles and responsibilities. This is done by determining the extent to which historical and educational background, as well as religion and political ideology influence the school governing body members' contributions to school governance. The actuality of this study is to determine the extent to which school governing bodies influence the transformation and democratisation of school governance. The evaluation of school governing bodies' influence on transformation and democratisation of school governance is necessary because in South Africa, and particularly in the semi-rural areas such as the Vryheid region, the school governing body is a relatively new phenomenon.

As the role of school governing bodies expands and as their position as legal representatives of the schools' interests becomes further legitimised, it becomes clear that they have to be involved in the decision-making process. This research therefore concentrates, among other things, on the school governing bodies' preparedness to contribute to the process of transformation and democratisation of school governance.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.2 1 Background to and significance of the study

South Africa has a long history of apartheid and other forms of unfair discrimination in education. In the past, there were different and unequal school and education systems based on ethnicity, race and colour. The 1994 elections brought to an end the apartheid era and a Government of National Unity was sworn in. This fledgling government, based on the principles of democracy, equity and redress, was determined to ensure that all

structures in South African society, including education, should reflect these principles. Hence, the governance of schools was to be restructured in keeping with these principles to ensure representation, participation and ownership by all stakeholders within the school community.

The 1996 South African Schools Act witnessed a growth of local democratic influence on school governance throughout the country. The system of school governing bodies in South Africa has undergone recent changes through this Act which, in effect, ensured that each school has its own governing body and took the first steps to standardise membership, including parents, teachers and learners. Despite the appropriateness of parental representation, there are still misunderstandings, confusion and conflicts with regard to the role of governing bodies in a dispensation of democratic school governance. The South African Schools Act has brought about significant changes with important implications for involving parents. It is still not clear whether parents have been properly prepared to face new challenges of school governance in a democratic school management system. This study will therefore try to reveal difficulties, conflicts, misunderstanding and other problems which may influence the effective functioning of school governing bodies.

1.2.2 Problem statement

The South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (RSA,1996) provided all public schools with a schedule of regulations for the establishment of school governing bodies. These regulations were promulgated in April 1997. They represent a significant shift, firstly, because the inclusion of constituencies represented on the governing bodies presents an opportunity to infuse the character of school governance with democracy and secondly, because governing bodies now have substantial powers and functions to influence the quality of education at those schools. However, many school communities do not yet have the requisite skills and experience to exercise their new powers (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:8).

It is sometimes assumed that the presence of parents on a governing body itself constitutes liaison between the school and the community it serves. Certainly the governing body offers the potential for developing such liaison. Yet, despite the appropriateness of parental representation, an elected parent on a governing body may have little contact with his or her constituents. Parent members have a clear duty of accountability to their fellow parents. But this is very difficult to discharge. This is a problem for parent members who may not be skillful at handling people or be conscientious in contacting the parents he or she represents. According to Gann (1998:149), parent governors seem to have more difficulty in feeling legitimate than any other category. It is probable that such a feeling might prevent these parent members from influencing major school-level decisions about the school and about its relations with others having educational responsibilities.

Parents, being legally responsible for their individual children's education, clients of the school and co-educators of their children, must clearly take pride of place among those adults with a stake in the school (Macbeth, 1989:128). This study will be investigating the role of parent governors in school governance, with emphasis on their influence on major school-level decisions about the school.

The above exposition gives rise to the following research questions:

- To what extent do school governing bodies influence major school-level decisions about the school?
- What constraining factors and challenges confront governing body members in the establishment of democratic school governance?
- What are stakeholders' perceptions of their roles on school governing bodies?

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to:

- Establish a theoretical framework about the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies in the management of schools and their influence on major school-level decisions about the schools through the ages. This will be done by surveying the history and theory of parent representation in the past and present. Reference will be made to the past because the discipline of education is intimately concerned with the past, as any educational problem is studied in its manifestation through the ages.
- Survey the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies with a view to determining the extent to which role-players co-operate in achieving their objectives and fulfil their obligations of providing the child with effective teaching. This will be done by obtaining a perspective on school governing bodies' involvement in the management of schools in foreign countries so as to find out the common problems encountered and how those problems were solved. The researcher will relate those solutions to our own problems as far as school governing body participation in the management of schools in the Vryheid region is concerned.
- Provide guidelines and recommendations for the establishment and maintenance of democratic school governance structures in the Vryheid region.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODS

While a more detailed explanation of the methodology, the rationale for the choice of methodology and research design will be presented in Chapter 3, a basic overview will be given in this paragraph. The research focussed on the influence of school governing bodies on the transformation and democratisation of school governance. The research methods that helped to reveal this influence were followed. These research methods included a literature survey and the use of structured interviews.

1.4.1 Literature survey

A study of literature on the roles, responsibilities and rights of school governing bodies was undertaken. Overseas literature as well as South African sources were studied. The literature study was used to gather information about school governing body involvement in the management of schools in general and their influence on the transformation and democratisation of school governance in particular. The literature survey was based upon the longitudinal consideration of recorded data indicating what has happened in the past and what the present situation reveals.

Literature material relevant to this work, for example literature on the establishment of school governing bodies and their roles and responsibilities, was selected. The process involved the consultation of journals, theses and every possible secondary source of information related to this work, within the limitations of time and other resources available to the researcher.

1.4.2 The structured interview

To supplement information not available from documents, a structured interview was used as a data-collecting tool. This structured interview was conducted at fifteen public schools in the Vryheid region. The purpose of this study is to generalise results to a group of school governors. In this study it was unnecessary to use all the individuals in the population as subjects. Schumacher and McMillan (1993:160) maintain that a sample saves time and money and provides valid results for the population if the sampling is done correctly.

A structured interview was considered suitable for this study because it is an economical and convenient way in which the researcher could communicate with respondents, since the selected schools are in relatively close proximity to the researcher. Terre Blanche and

Durrheim (1999:128) maintain that conducting an interview is a more natural form of interacting with people as it gives us an opportunity to get to know them quite intimately, so that we can really understand how they think and feel.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

Vryheid region is one of the eight education regions comprising the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department. It is situated in the north-western part of KwaZulu-Natal. The region covers seven magisterial districts, which include towns like Utrecht, Dundee, Nqutu, Paulpietersburg, Glencoe, Louwsburg and Babanango. The region is divided into four education districts with offices at Dundee, Nqutu, Bhhekuzulu and Paulpietersburg. There are fifteen circuits and there are five hundred and thirty-two schools.

Before the introduction of a single, non-racial education system in April 1994, the Vryheid region was non-existent. The education of the people of the Vryheid region was previously under the authority of the different racially determined education departments. There was the Department of Education and Culture (HoA), responsible for White students; the Department of Education and Culture (HoR), responsible for Coloured Education; the Department of Education and Culture (HoD), responsible for Indian Education; and the two Education Departments, that were both responsible for the provision of education to Black learners, namely the Department of Education and Culture (KwaZulu Government) and the Department of Education and Training.

With the introduction of a single, non-racial education system, all the schools in the north-western part of the province of KwaZulu-Natal were brought together under the control of one regional chief director. The bringing together of the traditionally separated schools into a single region is referred to as the regionalisation process. Before this process the schools were managed differently by the different racial education departments, which means that each racial department had its own education policy.

In this study the researcher chose the Vryheid region as his field of study because:

- The region includes examples of schools which were previously administered by all of the former education departments.
- The region has examples of primary and secondary schools as well as developed and under-developed schools.
- The region is geographically compact, thereby saving on traveling distance and time.
- The researcher is an educator resident in this region and therefore better-placed to focus on this region than any other region.

1.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

For a better understanding of this study it is imperative that certain terms and concepts are clarified. It is therefore important to identify and define the key concepts relating to transformation and school governance within the context in which they will be used in this study.

1.6.1 School Governing Body

A “school governing body” is a statutory body of people who are elected to govern a school (Potgieter, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch, 1997:23). This means that a governing body is set up by an Act of Parliament, in particular the South African Schools Act (RSA,1996). The school governors, that is the people serving on a governing body, represent the school community. The governance of every public school is vested in its governing body. The general purpose of a governing body is to perform efficiently its functions in terms of the Schools Act on behalf of the school and for the benefit of the school community. A school governing body is therefore placed in a position of trust towards a school (Potgieter, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch, 1997:23). In other words, a school governing body is expected to act in good faith, to carry out all its duties and functions on behalf of a school and be accountable for its actions. All school

governors must know what their duties and functions are and how these fit in with the duties of the principal. In this study the concept school governing body has been used to refer to a statutory body of people who are elected to govern a school.

1.6.2 School governors

According to the Oxford Dictionary (1998:511) a “governor” is the head or a member of a governing body of an institution. School governors serving in South African public schools are either elected or co-opted according to the South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (RSA,1996). School governors are members of governing bodies and they represent the school and its community. In other words, the job of the school governor is to promote the best interests of the school and to ensure that the learners at the school receive the best education possible. The main task of the school governors is to help the school principal to organise and manage the school’s activities in an effective and efficient way (Gann, 1998:78). In other words, school governors must help the principal to govern the school well, mainly by supporting the principal as professional manager in achieving the overall educational goals for the school set by the governing body. In this study the concept school governor is used to refer to the members of the school governing body who were elected or co-opted in accordance with the South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (RSA,1996).

1.6.3 Educational transformation

The verb “transform” means to make a thorough or dramatic change in the form, outward appearance, character, and so on (Oxford Dictionary, 1998:1296). The concept transformation therefore refers to an instance of transforming or the state of being transformed. Enslin and Pendlebury (1998) assert that transformation is an open-textured concept, understood differently by different people. Our understanding of educational transformation is shaped by constitutive meanings such as the removal of inequalities in access and resources in education provision, democratisation of the education system and

improvement of the quality of education (Waghid, 2000:81). This study has adopted Waghid's (2000:81) definition that educational transformation refers to the role that ought to be played by school governors to remove inequalities in access and resources, to democratise education and to improve the quality of education.

1.7 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Chapter 1 is an orientation to the problem and deals with the general background of school governance, the statement of the problem, aims of the study, the research methods that are used and the demarcation of the field of the study. Key concepts are also defined.

Chapter 2 surveys the history and theory of school governor involvement in the management of schools and discusses assumptions about and influences of such involvement. The role, responsibilities and the rights of school governors in education are discussed with reference to the past, so as to reveal generally valid current theories. A descriptive survey of school governing body participation in decision-making in the South African education system is given. Literature relating to overseas countries is also reviewed.

Chapter 3 gives an outline of this research project's exploration of school governing body participation in the management of schools. It outlines the empirical investigation into school governing bodies' involvement in the management of schools in the Vryheid region.

Chapter 4 analyses and discusses the findings and makes conclusions on the research project, with reference to the literature study as well as the empirical research on school governing bodies' role and responsibilities with regard to school governance.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and makes recommendations as to possible guidelines for school governing body involvement and participation in the management of schools in the Vryheid region.

1.8 SUMMARY

In this introductory chapter a general orientation to the research problem has been presented. In the problem statement it was indicated that research has to be done in order to disclose the role of the school governing bodies in the Vryheid region. In this chapter the aims of the study, the research methods that were used in the investigation as well as the demarcation of the field of study were outlined. It was also indicated that, in order to gain insight into the research problem, a review of literature is necessary. The following chapter therefore surveys the history and theory of school governing body involvement in the management of schools and discusses assumptions about, and some influences of such involvement. Literature from foreign countries as well as South African sources, has been reviewed.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY AND THEORY OF GOVERNING BODY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter a selection of literature on the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies is reviewed. This is done by surveying school governing body involvement in the management of schools with a view to determining the extent to which both the school governors and the principal achieve their objectives and fulfil their obligations of providing the learner with effective teaching. Foreign literature is also reviewed so as to determine the common problems encountered and how those problems were solved. The researcher will relate those solutions to the problems as far as school governing body participation in school governance in the Vryheid region is concerned.

In this chapter special attention is devoted to the school governing bodies' involvement in the decision-making process in schools and how this is perceived by the school governors and principals. This chapter discusses, *inter alia*, the following issues:

- The history and theory of school governing body involvement in the management of schools.
- The role, responsibilities and functions of the school governing body in terms of the South African Schools Act no.84 of 1996.
- The role that has been played by the social structures in shaping and conditioning the South African school governors on how to perform their duties within the hierarchical structure of the education department.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL ANALYTICAL BACKGROUND

This investigation was guided by the assumption that actions of people in particular social and historical contexts, as well as the roots and consequences of their actions, can be recognised and examined. By far the most important dimension of a critical theory of educational leadership is the fact that it is driven by the emancipatory interest; that is, its purpose is to contribute to bringing about a change in people's understanding of themselves and their practices and thus to free them from undue constraints of society (Waghid, 2000:91). Waghid further states that critical theory is interested in contributing to change in people's positions in life in relation to repressive forces that might impede their development. For Young (1990), critical theory should bring about decentralising administration needs and freeing institutions from bureaucratic and technical interests. Moreover, a critical theory should also re-theorise the institutional roles of members whose own technical, egocentric interests outweigh the need for greater openness. For example, critical theory demands that schools be managed at community level (Waghid, 2000:92). The roles of parents and educators as members of governing bodies cannot be ignored in changing patterns of school management.

In this study, critical theory was employed to examine, describe and explain the school governors' self-understanding with regard to their roles and responsibilities in a democratic school governance. It suggests the removal of inequalities in access and resources, and the removal of centralised control of the school management system. Critical theory is interested in the emancipation of human beings and their management practices in a particular social and historical context, and it also involves improving their practices, rationality and self-knowledge. For example, it is not sufficient merely to understand that school governors in disadvantaged school communities lack skills to participate in a democratic decision-making process. These school governors have to be assisted so as to ensure their freedom, social upliftment and educational empowerment.

2.3 THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES BEFORE 1996

The 1994 elections brought to an end the apartheid era. A Government of National Unity, based on the principles of democracy, equity and redress was sworn in. This new Government was determined to ensure that all structures in South African society should reflect the principles of democracy. Hence, the governance of schools was to be restructured in keeping with these principles to ensure representation, participation and ownership by all stakeholders within the school community.

The new Government inherited, from the former government, education departments which were structured along racial lines. Although each department had its own school ownership, governance and funding structures, the Department of National Education (DNE) determined norms and standards of governance for all the previous racial education departments. Three types of governance structures predominated at school level. These were school committees or management councils (mainly HoR, HoD, DET, and KDEC), and governing bodies of Model C schools (only HoA).

The main features of these separate, but vastly different school governance structures can be summarised as follows:

House of Assembly

(a) Natal Education Department

The Natal Education Department was composed of Model C schools which had governing bodies elected by parents with the principal in an ex-officio capacity (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:4). Other major stakeholders such as learners, teachers and community interest groups were not represented on Model C governing bodies. While the state provided teacher salaries, the governing bodies of these schools were responsible for the maintenance of their school facilities, were empowered by the law to

determine school policy on matters such as admissions and language policies, and had fiscal and legal powers (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998: 4).

(b) Department of Education and Training

The majority of the Department of Education and Training (DET) schools were state-aided (Department of Education, 1995:20). In these schools, management councils comprising nine parents, the principal (in an ex-officio capacity) and two co-opted members where necessary, were responsible for advising the principal, circuit inspector or director-general on wide-ranging matters including teacher employment and student admissions (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:4). In addition, management councils controlled school funds, supervised school property, decided on steps to be taken regarding student misconduct, and forwarded complaints and representations for the circuit inspector's attention. Admission and language policies fell outside their jurisdiction. The management councils' powers were largely advisory and consultative, which created an impression of parental participation in the control of education but did not give parents power over anything substantial (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:4).

House of Representatives : Department of Education and Culture

According to the Coloured Persons Education Act no.47 of 1965, each HoR school was required to have a five or seven member committee, depending on the enrolment of the school, elected by the parents. In the case of state-aided schools, committees comprised three parent-elected members and two members appointed by the owner of the school (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:5). The principal served on these committees in an ex-officio capacity, while other stakeholders such as learners, teachers and community organisations were not represented. Direct contact between committee members and teachers was discouraged and 'professional matters' were the concern of the principal and inspectorate (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:5). School committees, furthermore, had no input into admission and language policies.

House of Delegates : Department of Education and Culture

Within the framework of the Indian Education Act of 1965, Parent-Teacher Associations were legislated in 1991 as compulsory governance structures for every HoD state and state-aided school. These PTAs comprised two teachers and three to nine members, depending on the enrolment of the school, elected by parents, with the principal in an ex-officio capacity. In general, PTAs functioned as a link between the community and the school, promoting the school as a community, educational and cultural centre. PTAs had advisory powers only concerning admissions, use of school property, uniforms, duration of the school day, calendar, codes of conduct, extra-mural activities and adult education (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:5).

KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture

Legislation originally formulated for DET and adapted by the KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture (KDEC), made provision for school committees in KDEC schools, of which the majority were community schools (Department of Education, 1995:17). These committees comprised seven parents and the principal in an ex-officio capacity. School committee meetings were closed to non-members and their powers and functions were similar to the management councils of the DET school, again with an appearance of parental participation, but denying parents any real power. School committees had no real influence over school policy but were expected to raise funds for new buildings, school maintenance and school running costs (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:7).

The afore-mentioned governance structures were fraught with a plethora of inadequacies and problems, particularly among the DET, KDEC and to a lesser extent, the HoR and HoD schools. Local communities of these schools demanded equity and redress. They complained about administrative inefficiency; were critical of poor quality of education in many schools; denounced the inaccessibility of better quality state schools in other group areas and showed dissatisfaction with the existing classification of schools into

different categories (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:9). Above all, the local communities railed against the weakness and illegitimacy of existent governance structures. These problems led to demands for transformation of the school governance structures.

There were calls for democratic governance structures along the lines of PTAs and PTSAs, to enable ownership and participation by all stakeholders of the school community (African National Congress, 1995:26). There was a desire among the school communities to shift the balance of power away from the customary school committees and management councils to parents, workers, teachers and students (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:6). The South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 (RSA,1996), which detailed a new and simple classification of schools with uniform governance structures, was passed in 1996. Under this Act, schools were reclassified into two categories, namely, public schools and independent schools.

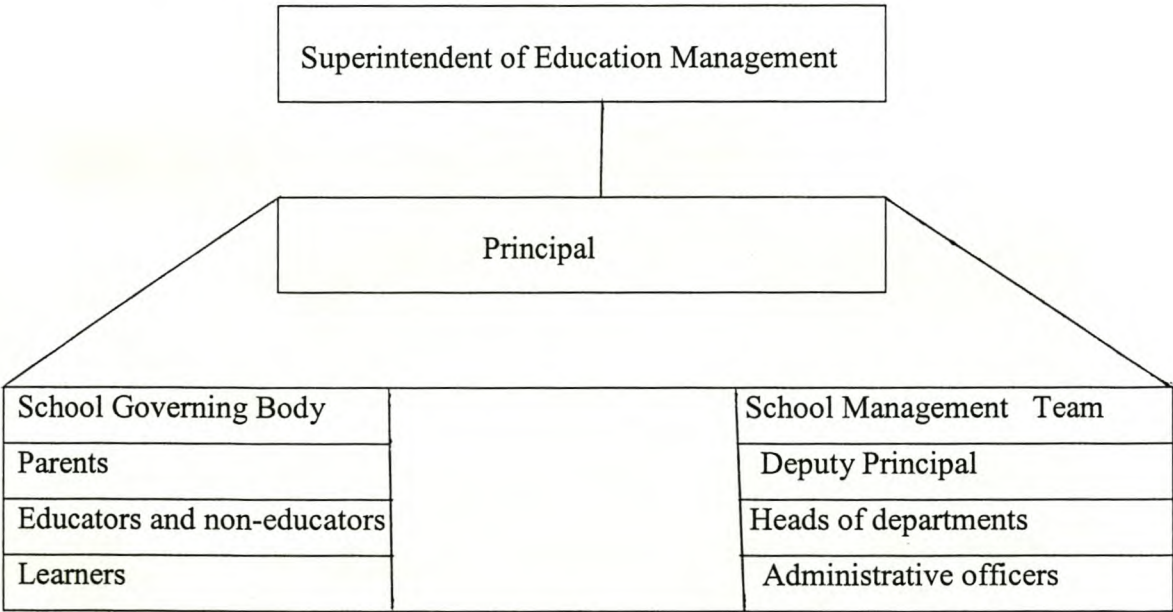
Independent schools are those which are privately owned and whose teachers are not appointed and employed by the state. Public schools are funded wholly or largely from the state resources and are subject to the state's policies for schooling, including governance. Under this new Act, all public schools were compelled to institute new governance structures within a given period as announced in the Government Gazette. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for education used the KwaZulu-Natal School Education Act No.3 of 1996 and the South African Schools Act no.84 of 1996 to provide all public schools in the province with a schedule of regulations for the establishment of school governing bodies. These regulations were promulgated in April 1997. They represent a significant shift, firstly, because the inclusion of constituencies represented on the governing bodies presents an opportunity to infuse the character of school governance with democracy and secondly, because governing bodies now have substantial powers and functions to influence the quality of education at those schools (McPherson and Dlamini, 1998:10).

It is possible that many school communities do not yet have the requisite skills and experience to exercise their new powers. The Schools Act requires provincial

departments to facilitate the training of governing bodies for this purpose. This places great responsibility on provincial departments which are themselves experiencing capacity problems. It is still not clear whether the school governance capacity building programmes in KwaZulu-Natal, and particularly in the semi-rural areas such as the Vryheid region, are successful in training governing bodies to influence the quality of education at school level. The following paragraphs examine the role and responsibilities of a governing body in a democratic school governance structure.

**2.4 THE PLACE AND DUTY OF A SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY IN A
SYSTEM OF DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

The following diagram indicates where the governing body fits into the structure of school governance. Thereafter the duties of the different role-players shown in the diagram will be explained briefly.



Governance at school level (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata, Squelch, 1997:15).

The above diagram suggests a hierarchy of power in which the principal is over both SGB and SMT. This is precisely the problem area. In fact, in a proper functioning school governance system the SGB is at the top apex of the hierarchy because according to Taylor (1998 : 16) SGBs are the seat of power over school policy.

The South African Schools Act sets out in detail the duties of the role-players with respect to the organisation, governance and funding of schools. Some of those duties, in so far as they are relevant to governing bodies, are briefly described below:

(i) The principal

The principal serves as a member of the governing body in his or her official capacity and must help the governing body to perform its functions. An important restriction upon the principal, over and above those of all governors, is that he or she cannot chair formal full governing body meetings.

(ii) Educators and non-educator staff members

Each school has one or two educators and non-educators serving in the governing body, according to size and enrolment of the school. They serve as elected members of the governing body. They are elected by their peers. They clearly are accountable to their colleagues and have a duty to represent their views and interests.

(iii) Parents

Parents serve as elected members on a governing body and must see to it that a high standard of education is provided by the school. Parent governors have a duty of accountability to their electoral body – their fellow parents. It is significant that the relevant legislation recognises parents as the most important stakeholders by specifying that parents must be in the majority on the governing body and that the chairperson must be a parent governor (Taylor, 1998:18).

(iv) Learners

In grade eight or higher, learners serve as elected members of the governing body. They are elected by the Representative Council of Learners to represent the interests of the learners of the school.

2.5 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL AFFAIRS

Literature on parental involvement reveal that parents have not always been welcomed into the world of schools (Macbeth, 1989:129). This is strange because they, surely, are the clients, consumers, customers, as well as being the primary educators. Yet there have been notorious cases when the active involvement of parents has been condemned. Some schools are still very unwelcoming to all outsiders. Gann (1998:149) maintains that:

“Schools that are complacent about their relationships with parents say one of two things (sometimes both). They say that parents (those that don’t turn up at parents’ evenings, PTA meetings or the annual parents’ meeting) are apathetic, they don’t think that their children’s education is important. Or they say that parents don’t feel the need to come, because they are happy with everything the school does. Any governing body that accepts these views is doing its parent body – even if only a small part of it – a grave injustice”

The above comment implies the need for a proactive relationship between parents and the school – not information after the event, as is so often the case. It assumes that information will be given to parents in ways that they can best understand, explore and use; that teachers report to parents at appropriate times in appropriate surroundings, using appropriate language and treating the exercise as a dialogue where both partners have something to offer (Gann 1998:157). Participation of parents has to be meaningful, as well as proactive. It must be focused on the only interest that they share with the school – the progress of the child. Gann (1998:158) maintains that the place for governors to start the review of their school is where the community starts – at the school gate. This implies that schools need to look carefully at the arrangements they make for public and parental

access. Parent-governors are particularly well placed to advise on this because they are not in the school every day and don't become inured to the surroundings (Gann 1998:158). Governing bodies are therefore the repository of an enormous amount of information and knowledge, and understanding of the community. They should share the knowledge they have on a regular basis.

2.6 THE QUALITY OF PARENT GOVERNORS

Various categories of people have a stake in the school, but the nature and extent of their stake in it can differ. Parents, being legally responsible for their individual children's education, must clearly take pride of place among those adults with a stake in the school. While it is easy to devise a system whereby teachers can choose colleagues to represent them on a governing body, it is less easy to achieve the same with parents. Macbeth (1989:129) points out that one frequently hears the accusation that a parent-governor is not 'representative' because he or she was elected by only five percent of parents. Such accusations indicate the fact that there is a strong probability that some school governing bodies may fail to reflect true feelings of parents, more especially if parents were not consulted before any decision concerning the education of their children was taken.

Another problem is whether the representative operates as a trustee or as a delegate (Macbeth, 1989:130). A trustee functions as an individual, according to his or her own assessment of events and conscience, without feeling an obligation to refer back to those who elected him or her on any given issue. A delegate would constantly seek the views of the parents whom he or she represents. Macbeth (1989:130) points out furthermore that the elected parent can find reporting to his or her constituents awkward unless there is an effective Parent Association. Eulau and Prewitt (1973:24) have argued that the degree to which the representatives are responsive to the constituents is the *sine qua non* of whether democracy in fact exists.

Mbowane (2000:15) claims that in South Africa, the previous school committees had been oppressive bodies established by the apartheid system and school boards whose employment trends were characterised by “employment of whose son or daughter you were”. She further claims that by virtue of their function these school committees became demigods in the oppression of teachers. It was for these reasons that teachers’ organisations, such as the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), rejected and nullified the structure of school committees. A new structure, which represented parents, teachers and students was introduced through the passing of the South African Schools Act no.84 of 1996. This Act allowed for school governing bodies to develop individual school policies.

Given this task of drafting school policies, it is doubtful whether school governing body members received the necessary training to enable them to accomplish this task effectively. One might not be surprised to learn that most of the school governing bodies in this country are still struggling with this task of drafting school policies. It is also probable that some of the school governing bodies would follow pre-established procedures. Macbeth (1989:136) maintains that school governing body members, on appointment and subsequently, may find themselves under pressure to conform to patterns of behaviour which are supportive of the bureaucracy. It is therefore likely that there can be an element of conservatism among the school governing body members, more especially those who are not satisfied about the present standards in the education system. Some school governing body members may be ‘socialised’ into approaching the school’s aims and problems from the view point of the education authority (Macbeth, 1989:126). In such circumstances, it may become difficult to observe any difference from the previous school committee and the present school governing body. This may be true especially in situations where the members of the old school committee were re-elected into the new system of school governing body without undergoing any form of training.

Traditionally, it has been part of the chairperson’s responsibility to co-operate with the principal in taking major decisions on school affairs. It is therefore probable that

chairpersons of school committees were familiar with the top-down, hierarchical communication channels prescribed by the previous education departments. With the introduction of democracy, and thus the new governing body system, the absolute authority of the chairperson is tested. The South African Schools Act requires full participation of all stakeholders in decision-making. Qwelane (1993:29) maintains that decentralisation of school governance was seen as facilitating the democratisation of education and thus the building of effective organs of civil society wherein administration would be informed by relevant – and empowered – constituents. This statement suggests a change in the established bureaucratic management structure of schools.

In conclusion it could be suggested that it is necessary to investigate the position of parent representatives in school governance in a country where transformation of the education system, including school management, has so recently taken place. It is a fact that most of today's parents, who are present members in most school governing bodies, are a product of the South African education system which was based on apartheid. This makes it probable that certain undemocratic practices might have been learned by some parent representatives during the apartheid era. For some it might be difficult to accommodate all the stakeholders, including learners, in the decision-making process as this was not the case in the previous structure.

It is interesting to attempt a study on the extent to which school governing body members are prepared to change their attitudes, as Badenhorst (1995:142) puts it; “practices that have become entrenched over time are very difficult to change, even if the need for change becomes clear to those in authority”. This study is therefore an attempt to disclose the real perceptions, feelings, fears and aspirations of school governing body members about their new roles and responsibilities in the school governance system. It will help education authorities in the Vryheid region to develop relevant workshops and training programmes which would assist the school governing body members to perform their tasks effectively in a democratic school governance system.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter a brief historical survey of school governing body involvement in the management of schools in South Africa was presented. It was indicated that in most instances some of the important stakeholders, such as parents, teachers and learners were often excluded from the decision-making process that affected major educational activities in schools. It was also indicated that the undemocratic situations which characterised the South African school governance system shaped to a large extent the views and opinions of most school governors regarding their roles and responsibilities towards school governance. Some of the school governors were socialised into approaching the school's aims and problems from the view point of the education authority. It was discovered that this undemocratic conditioning made it difficult for the school governors of the apartheid education departments to accept their new roles in a shared decision-making process.

Other issues that were discussed in this chapter include the traditional as well as the new roles and positions of school governing body members within the South African Schools Act of 1996; the place and duty of a school governing body in democratic school governance; and the quality of parent-governors who are elected into democratic governing bodies.

The following chapter gives an outline of the exploration of school governing body participation in school governance. It describes the empirical investigation into the role and responsibilities of a school governing body in democratic school governance.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENT GOVERNORS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodological procedures adopted to acquire the data needed on the current state of involvement of parent governors in school governance in the rural Vryheid area of KwaZulu Natal and how participative school governance in this area can be brought about by expanding current involvement of parent governors (cf section 1.2). The selection and design of the research instruments are discussed, followed by presentation, analysis and interpretation of data.

3.2 AIM OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

The method of empirical investigation was preferred because it is an efficient method of assessing attitudes or opinions towards individuals, organizations, events or procedures (Gay 1987: 11). This study involves assessing the opinion and attitudes of parents governors with regard to their roles in school governance. To achieve this, use was made of primary sources such as correspondence between parent governors and school managers, newspaper cuttings and circulars from the Department of Education (cf section 1.4). To supplement the information in the documents, the empirical investigation becomes indispensable, since it is concerned with finding out “what is” (Borg & Gall 1989:331). This type of investigation was chosen to provide important leads in identifying needed emphases and necessary changes in participative school governanc.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

The population relevant to this study comprised parent governors and school managers in the Vryheid region (cf Paragraph 1.5). There are four hundred and eighty-three schools in this region. Vryheid region is one of the eight education regions that form KwaZulu – Natal Education Department. The researcher chose the Vryheid region because it has the desired population, namely that a large number of schools are classified under the category of previously disadvantaged schools. Most of these schools are found in the rural parts of the Vryheid region.

In this study it was unnecessary to use all individuals in the population as subjects. Rather, a sample was selected from the population to provide subjects. Schumacher and McMillan (1993:160) maintain that a sample saves time and money and provides valid results for the population if the sampling is done correctly. The method of sampling chosen by the researcher was that of nonprobability sampling. This method is relevant for this study because Vryheid as an education region consists of a large group of parent governors who come from the previously disadvantaged communities. Nonprobability sampling would therefore help the researcher to choose those subjects who are easily available to the researcher. Schumacher and McMillan (1993:160) maintain that in many educational studies it may be impossible or unfeasible to select subjects from a larger group. The researcher used nonprobability sampling to select fifteen school governing bodies from fifteen schools which were previously disadvantaged. These subjects were chosen first and foremost because their characteristics appear representative of much of the population. All the subjects are newly elected governors who have the responsibility to implement democratic school governance in accordance with the South African Schools Act of 1996.

3.4 HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

3.4.1 Development of the interview

Since the population that was covered was mostly illiterate, semi-structured interviews were a relevant technique in this investigation. Many educationalists such as Schumacher and McMillan (1993:250) concur in stating that an interview is flexible and adaptable and can be used with many different problems and types of persons, such as those who are illiterate so that responses can be probed, followed up, clarified, and elaborated to achieve specific accurate responses.

Two sets of semi-structured interview questions were developed; one for the parent-governors and the other for the school principals. The questions for parent governors were developed because the gist of this study comprises their perceptions of the school governing bodies. According to the South African Schools Act of 1996 the parent governors occupy a major position which requires them to be involved in major decision-making. The other interview schedule was developed for principals because they are in the forefront of any educational activity in schools. They perform a functional activity and they cannot be left out in a research project that concerns them directly. Above all they are in the position to answer many questions with regard to the involvement of parent governors in their schools. The construction of the interview questions was guided by the general principles suggested by Schumacher and McMillan (1993:42). Semi-structured questions were phrased to allow unique responses for each subject. The responses were coded, tabulated, and summarised numerically.

A personal request was made to the principals and chairpersons of the school governing bodies for permission to collect data from their schools (cf Appendix A).

3.4.2 Interview questions

3.4.2.1 Pilot study

Pre-testing was done with two school governing bodies in the Vryheid-East circuit in the second week of September 2001. This was done in accordance with Leedy's (1989:143) observation:

“All questions should be pre-tested on a small population.... Every researcher should give the questions to at least half a dozen friends or neighbours to test whether there are any items that they have difficulty in understanding or that may not ask exactly what the writer of the question is seeking to determine.”

Through the use of pre-testing, the researcher was satisfied that the questions asked were meaningful because clear responses were received from the respondents and hence, on the basis of the feedback received, no adjustments were made to draft questions.

3.4.2.2 Final administration of interviews

During the third week of September 2001 arrangements were made with the schools' administrations to interview parent governors and principals in their respective schools. The interviews commenced on 8 October 2001. Two schools were visited each day and the researcher spent about two hours with each school governing body. The researcher spent a few minutes with introductory conversation in order to establish a proper relationship. Before asking specific questions the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the interview. The questions were then addressed to the respondents in the exact words indicated on the interview schedule (cf Appendix B). As the subjects responded to the questions, the researcher took notes based on the answers. On 17 October 2001 the interview schedule was completed.

Having outlined the methodological procedures adopted in the empirical investigation, the following section is directed to an analysis of data obtained in connection with the formulated research questions.

3.5 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

3.5.1 Data concerning parent governors

One parent governor at each of the sixteen schools, in most instances the chairperson of the school governing body, was interviewed (cf Appendix B).

Question 1

Has the new governing body been established in accordance with departmental instructions?

Interviewees were asked whether school governing bodies had been established at their schools. All of them (100%) confirmed that school governing bodies had been elected and established in accordance with departmental instructions.

Question 2

What do you see to the difference between the role of the previous school committees and the new school governing bodies?

Four respondents (25%) were not in a position to answer this question. They stated that it was their first time of serving in a school governance structure. It was therefore understandable why they could not compare the role of the previous school committees and the present school governing bodies as they know little or nothing regarding the role of school committees. Five respondents (31,25 %) stated that they see very little difference between the roles of these two structures. These respondents maintained that

their roles are still largely advisory and consultative, and 'professional matters' are still the concern of the principal and the superintendent of education management. The only difference they mentioned was that, unlike the school committees, the school governing bodies carry the legal responsibility for a number of activities within the school. Seven participants (43,75 %) maintained that the fact that school governing bodies now have substantial powers and functions to influence the quality of education at schools makes them differ from the previous school committees.

Question 3

What do you see as the difference between the role of the principal and the chairperson?

All participants (100%) agreed that there is a difference between the role of the principal and that of the chairperson. They all stated that the role of the principal is the professional management of the school whereas the chairperson is responsible for the governance of the school. The participants highlighted the following differences between the role of the principal and the chairperson:

Principal

- Manage personnel and finances
- Perform and carry out professional functions
- Day-to-day administration and organisation of teaching and learning at the school
- Organise all activities which support teaching and learning
- Decide on textbooks, educational materials and equipment to be bought

Chairperson

- Control and maintain school property
- Promote the best interests of the school
- Ensure the development of the school by providing quality education for all learners at the school
- Support principal, educators and other staff in carrying out their professional duties

- Buy textbooks, educational materials or equipment for the school

Question 4

Do you see yourselves as one group or as separate groups on one school governing body?

Four respondents (25 %) maintained that they see themselves as separate groups on one school governing body. These participants argued that each component in the governing body is a separate unit which represents the interests of its own constituency. They expressed frustration with the party political tactics employed by their principals, and they felt that these principals were ‘closing ranks’ against them because they view them with suspicion. This might have made them feel that they were there only to represent the interests of their children at the expense of the school’s development. The rest of the participants (75 %) view themselves as one group that should have a genuine commitment to improving the school regardless of differences of opinion.

Question 5

Of which aspects of school governance do you feel you have little knowledge?

In this question the interviewees were expected to mention only those aspects which they feel they have difficulty in comprehending. The respondents mentioned the following aspects:

Financial services, including fundraising, and accurate and up-to-date budget information
Staffing, including sharing responsibility with the Education Department for appointment and dismissal, ensuring and overseeing appraisal of staff in schools

The curriculum – keeping an up-to-date written statement of its policy for the secular curriculum, to which school governing bodies must ‘have regard’ when determining their

school aims; settling complaints about the curriculum; ensuring delivery of Curriculum 2005 in their schools

Consultative skills and how to encourage participation, giving decision-making powers to parents and the community

Meetings, including the compiling of agenda and the writing of minutes

Question 6

What do you perceive as the role of the school governing bodies?

Asked what they regard as the role of the governing body, respondents offered a wide range of responses. The following is a summary of parent governors' understanding of the role of the school governing bodies:

School policy: this involves determining school hours, language policy, religious policy, dress code, and the school's vision and mission

School finance: raising funds, opening a bank account, overseeing the school's income and expenses, and motivating parents to pay school fees

School administration: looking after the school's buildings, grounds and the property and deciding when others may use their property, the appointment of the staff, an annual general meeting of parents, and reporting to the school community

School management: help the principal, educators and other staff to perform their professional functions; establish a suitable environment for learning, maintain standard of teaching and learning

Asked if they are able to perform their duties successfully, parent governors could not give specific answers. Generally speaking, parent governors felt that they were not yet having much effect – they believe they are starting to have an effect but that it is still very limited. As one respondent stated: “ these are still early days”

Question 7

What kind of help would you like to receive?

All respondents felt that it was imperative that they get help in order to have a meaningful role to play on the governing bodies. They mentioned the following topics as the most important areas.

How to manage a meeting
How to take, record and keep minutes
How to write a constitution
How to manage school finances
How to read and interpret legislation
How do committees interact with the main body
How to communicate with the department
How to make policies effective
How to develop a school vision and mission

This indicates that there is an urgent need to train, and retrain if necessary, parent governors.

Question 8

How do you think that help must come from?

The participants identified the following people and institutions that they believed are in a good position to help school governing bodies to obtain information and develop skills that would assist them to perform their duties successfully:

- The principal and staff of the school
- Superintendents of education based at district and regional offices of the provincial department of education.
- Teacher association or unions
- Experienced members of the schools that have had experience of a governing body before
- Colleges of education or universities
- Non-governmental organization

Question 9

How often do you report back to your constituents?

All respondents indicated that the only opportunity they get to report back to parents is through the meetings which are usually held four times a year, that is, one parent meeting in every quarter of the year. Beside these compulsory meetings, there is no other feedback or contact mechanism. While they feel responsible to an identifiable constituency when consulting and negotiating a school decision, they express feelings of frustration about the difficulties in presenting a 'parental view.' This lack of feedback mechanism is raising the question of representativeness. One wonders how accountable parent governors could be to those who had voted for them.

Question 10

How do you perceive your relationship with the principal?

Five respondents (31,25%) claimed that very little change of attitude has taken place since the establishment of school governing bodies. Their principals still perceive them

as lay people who lack the skills and expertise to govern over school affairs. They continue to claim that all decisions, except for those of the most trivial nature, are still made by higher authorities. This, they maintain, leaves the power in schools very much in the hands of the principals. Four participants (25%) were not sure of the kind of relationship that exists between them and their principals. This can be attributed to the fact that these parent governors are still new in their job (cf question 2), and that it therefore may be difficult for them to have a clear perception of their relationship with principals. Seven interviewees (43,75%) maintained that they have a good working relationship with their principals. They stated that the development and training programmes provided by the Education Department has helped to define specific areas of responsibility and this has in turn helped to minimise role conflicts. This has contributed to the formation of positive perceptions and attitudes because each party knows its place and there is no overarching control of schools. These respondents maintained that the principals, in their ex-officio capacity, are perceived as resource persons.

3.5. 2 Data concerning principals

Question 11

What are your views regarding parent representation on the governing body?

Seven respondents (43,75%) expressed their doubt about the representativeness of the elected parent governors, claiming that in the schools these parent governors were elected by a small percentage of parent. They based their views on poor attendance at the parent election meetings as well as their reluctance to stand for elections. These respondents further mentioned that, even though electoral procedures were made as appropriate as possible, rural areas found it more difficult to recruit skillful parent governors because these areas present a variety of problems which prevent parents from coming to meetings. It is for these reasons according to their view, that elections in their schools were not hotly contested and neither were there any disputes about the conduct of ballot.

Eight respondents (50%) maintain that parent governors were indeed representative of their respective parent communities. They accept the fact that attendance at the parent election meetings was poor but they claim that elected parents come from the communities. The fact that they attended election meetings indicate that they are confident, well-informed and articulate, and that these facts matter more than how many votes made them governors.

Question 12

What should be the role of parent governors regarding curriculum matters?

There were two extremes regarding this question. The first group which made up seven (43,75%) of the population rejected outright the involvement of parents on curriculum matters. These respondents claimed that involving lay people in curriculum matters might pose a threat to the development of teaching as a profession. They see a potential danger to their role as educators and professionals if lay people with little or no expertise are allowed to interfere with the professional duties. They went on to point out the following reasons for excluding parent governors:

- There is a danger that influential people, such as politicians would hijack the process and further their own agenda.
- Parent governors are already overwhelmed by the amount of paper for reading, the responsibilities of financial management and staff employment. Adding curriculum responsibility would be highly inappropriate.
- Educators are trained on curriculum matters and therefore their knowledge and influence is enough to inform and moderate parents governors' decisions.
- It is still too early to involve parents, and particularly rural parents who may be predominantly illiterate, in curriculum matters that require specialised training, experience and expertise of a professional educator.

The second group (56,25%) strongly believe that parent governors have a very important role regarding curriculum matters. They stated the following reason to support their view:

- Only parent governors can express what parent and other community members expect from their children's academic, social, personal and cultural education, and what their aspirations are for their children.
- There should be an alliance between school and home where children are supported and encouraged by adults to do well and complete their homework. Any child from such a home will learn better because of the alliance between home and school, and parent governors provide the first stage of such an alliance.
- Parent governors provide a valuable conduct, passing information and explanations between school and community, checking school procedures and actions for acceptability within the community, and explaining the context of community actions and reactions to the school.

These respondents argued that it would be difficult for parent governors to determine school aims, settle complaints about the curriculum or to ensure delivery of curriculum debates. They therefore concluded that parents governors will express the community and the parental view.

Question 13

How do you perceive your role as an ex-officio member of the school governing body?

All respondents felt that they have an important role to play since they are responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. They have to give input to the governing body about professional matters and the needs of the school. Together with the governing body, principals have to maintain standards by selecting appropriate staff, using finances effectively and instilling proper discipline. The participants maintained that in their communities, which are rural and underdeveloped, they have to provide a lot of guidance

and motivation because most parents are either illiterate or semi-literate. Parent governors in these communities rely heavily on the principal's leadership when making decisions about the schools.

These respondents claimed that they might also play a role in helping the governing body members to interpret departmental policies, where there is ambiguity. Their role may also include the following:

- Regular reporting to the governing body on the general conditions and progress of the school, and on special occurrences since the last meeting.
- Source of information on whether the school is doing what the governing body planned it should do.
- Acting as a liaison officer between department officials and the school governing body.

On the basis of the researcher's experience as an educator, a list of suggestions was generated to include all reasons or suggestions he had heard mentioned. These were then reduced to a short list of eight. The respondents were asked first to study all eight suggestions and then to rank the suggestions in order of importance from 1-8. Subsequently it was established how many respondents allotted a rating of 1 or 2 to each of the suggestions, and the ranking of the suggestions was done accordingly.

The first step the researcher took was to give each response an identity number. The second step was the scoring of the questions. The scoring of data was done by hand and an extra check was done by a qualified A-test user from Petermaritzburg who conducts psychometric and edumetric tests for students in the area and is an expert in scoring standardised tests. Rechecking is recommended by Gay (1987:336), when he states that it is advisable to have at least one other person scoring the tests as a reliability check.

After the tests were scored, the results were transferred to a summary data sheet. The scores were systematically manually recorded. Each item was assigned to its own

column. Since data analysis involved item analysis, all the scores for each item were tabulated at the end, as each item formed a subgroup. This was done without the aid of the computer because there was a limited number of variables are involved, and if relatively simple statistical analyses are to be performed, the use of a calculator may be the most efficient approach.

After the statistical analyses had been completed, all the data was rechecked. The original scores were rechecked, as well as the data sheet. Presented below is statistical table drawn up from the replies to the questions, together with brief analyses and interpretation of the data.

Table 3.1 : Suggestions on how parental involvement can be implemented in schools, categorised according to the importance rating

	Number and percentage of respondent who allotted a rating of 1 or 2
Suggestions	Order of importance
1. Parents control the use of premises outside the school day, and have a policy for community use of buildings.	11 (73,3%)
2. Parents buy textbooks, educational materials or equipment for the school.	9 (60%)
3. Parents have a say in the development and monitoring of the curriculum	8 (53,3%)
4. Parents to question, challenge, become involved and make decisions in the best interest of the children	6 (40%)
5. Parents help the principal, educators and other staff to perform their functions	5 (33,3%)
6. Parents act as teacher-assistants in classroom situations e.g. supervising reading lessons, atrs, technology,etc	4 (26,6%)
7. Parents select and appoint principals, educators and other staff.	3 (20%)
8. Parents inspect and monitor the quality of the education, providing school with information they need to improve.	2 (13,3%)

should ensure that these are maintained properly for future generations. The suggestion that the parents should buy the textbooks, educational material or equipment for the school was also rated as important. This implies that most principals know that they need parents in order to promote effective teaching and effective learning. It is interesting to note that the suggestions that parents should inspect and monitor the quality of education, providing schools with the information they need to improve received the lowest rating. This may be attributed to the fact that school principals from underdeveloped communities have more insight with regard to the level of education of parents on these communities. It may also be that parents, because of the poor level of parental involvement in schools, are not exposed to developments in education which would make it difficult for them to recognise quality education.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with an empirical investigation into the parents governors' and principals' perspectives of school governing bodies in the Vryheid region. The research technique used in this investigation included two kinds of semi-structured interviews (one intended for parent governors and the other for school principals). These semi-structured interviews were designed to assess the perceptions of both the parent governors and school principals with regard to the role of school governing bodies in school governance. The methodological procedures adopted in acquiring the data in connection with the research problem were discussed whereafter data were analysed and interpreted. Once the statistical data had been interpreted, the researcher made use of the literature study and own experience in order to assess the validity of the findings in a triangular fashion to strengthen the validity of the results. That means that where statistics revealed a tendency in one direction or another, the searching question: "Why is it like that?" was posed. The approach of probing the causative factor rather than being satisfied with only the empirical data, permeates this investigation for it is only by identifying the causative factors that the problem surrounding parent governors

being satisfied with only the empirical data, permeates this investigation for it is only by identifying the causative factors that the problem surrounding parent governors involvement in school governance can be exposed and solved. Among the most important findings, this investigation revealed that:

- There is a need for training in view of the recent establishment of governing bodies. Training would ensure clarity of roles and effective participation among stakeholders.
- There appears to be a strong, positive, attitude of parent governors with regard to their own involvement in school governance.

The following chapter discusses the findings and the conclusions of the whole study in detail, according to the literature study as well as empirical investigation into the perception of the parent governors and school principals from the rural part of Vryheid region.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings emanating from the study and to describe which conclusions were drawn. Attempts were made to collate responses to individual aspects, so as to arrive at specific conclusions. The findings are presented in two phases according to the purpose of the research, namely, findings with regards to parent governors, followed by the factors which were found to be prominent in shaping these role players' perceptions of school governing bodies.

4.2 FINDINGS

The study reveals that the process of establishing school governing bodies seemed to have been smooth except for the parent elections. Problems centered on poor attendance of parents and their reluctance to stand for elections. These are cause for concern because the South African Schools Act requires democratic participation of all stakeholders in the school community. Parents' reluctance to participate in elections places a serious constraint on the potential of an important role-player. On the other hand some principals have a longer tradition of managing schools on their own because governing bodies are a relatively recent structure in most schools. However, that tradition often undermines the functioning of school governing bodies as is evident from the investigation. The following are the findings emanating from the empirical investigation as well as from the literature study with regard to the current parent governor involvement in school governance, the principals' role within the school governance structure, and their attitudes and perceptions of the school governing bodies.

4.2.1 Parent governor involvement in the management of schools

The way in which an education system is structured, managed and governed impacts directly on the process of learning and teaching. Education governance during the apartheid years was a complex mixture of centralised and decentralised forms of administration and control. The basic centralisation of this system has left a legacy of restrictive centralised control which inhibits change and initiative. The focus of management remained oriented towards employees complying with rules rather than on ensuring quality service delivery. Despite principals' response (cf question 11), that they would like parents to have a say in the governance of their schools, there have been only limited or a total lack of attempts to include parents in the governance of education at all levels.

Despite the principals' consideration of the principle of inclusion, parent governors' participation in the management of school is not without its problems and limitations. The lack of adequate training programmes for the involvement of parent governors in school governance has been one factor contributing to the problems concerning parent governor participation. Additionally, the principals' perceptions, feelings and attitudes with regard to the parental involvement in curriculum matters have some times made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to consult parents when designing school curriculum. This is supported by Hartshorne (1988:3) when he describes the kind of policy, climate and environment in which South African bureaucrats have been conditioned to operate as having the characteristics of being inflexible, doctrinaire, uncritical, authoritarian and a short step away from being arrogant.

A further reason for the difficulties experienced in the democratic involvement of parents in school governance relates to the products of intentional strategies employed by both parent governors and school principals to maintain or to advance their own prerogatives and self-interests. The prerogatives and self-interests are likely to be grounded not only in the assumption or aspirations that parent governors and principals hold about parent

participation in decision-making but in the perceptions, beliefs and behaviours associated with previous working relationships between principals and school committees. This kind of policy, climate and environment in which both the principals and the school committee members were conditioned to operate might have an influence on their perception of their new working relationships.

4.2.1.1 Attitude of parent governors towards their involvement in school governance

In chapter 3 it was indicated that most of the parent governors in the rural communities of the Vryheid region are either illiterate or semi-literate. This has a profound influence on their attitudes towards the roles and responsibilities in school governance. The low level of education among rural parents not only leads to their reluctance to stand in governing body elections, but also to confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities within the school governance system. In the following paragraphs parent governors' attitudes towards their involvement in school governance will be discussed.

4.2.1.2 Reluctance to stand for election

The study revealed that most parents in the Vryheid region are reluctant to stand for elections as members of the school governing body. The reluctance of nominees to stand for elections was attributed to reasons of age, illiteracy, workload as well as poor attendance at election meetings. The participants ascribed these to general apathy and reluctance to participate in and take responsibility for community structures. Such attitudes defeat the principle of involving parent governors in school governance which is in line with the democratic ethos of public policy development that has been emerging in South Africa.

4.2.1.3 Sceptical attitudes

The findings revealed that parent governors often express scepticism about school principals' motives and intentions in "giving" them opportunities to participate in decisions made at higher levels of the school. Parent governors may see participation as constituting little more than a "rubber stamp". The parent governors, who were members of the previous school committees, might have experienced a situation where they belonged to the governance structure without clear definition of their roles and responsibility. This has increased their scepticism about their present involvement in decision-making. The engendered critical reactions regarding the recent proposals to enhance the participation of parent governors might have contributed to the difficulties faced by some principals in their attempts to incorporate school governing body members into the school governance structures.

4.2.1.4 Inferiority complex

In all the school governing bodies in the rural Vryheid region, principals are playing a determining role. This is partly due to the fact that correspondence is directed to principals so they are initially more informed than elected school governing body members. In addition, some principals have a longer tradition of managing schools on their own because governing bodies are a relatively recent structure in these rural schools. This tradition often undermines the functioning of parent governors because the principals dominate most meetings and override suggestions made by school governing body members. This type of bad practice counters principles such as inclusivity, equality and freedom of expression, and it may result in the uninformed parent governors feeling inferior.

4.2.1.5 Lack of self-confidence

Factors such as ignorance about school governance, low level of education and reluctance to participate result in a personal lack of confidence among parent governors in their

ability to engage with others. Such problems, rooted in misunderstanding roles and misinterpreting policies, inhibit school governing bodies from performing effectively and executing their statutory function. Problems centering on role-misunderstanding and misinterpretation of functions are worsened by the need to persuade less confident parent governors to become involved and to lead parents away from their dependency on a strong and articulate individual in the person of a principal.

4.2.2 Principals' views of parent governors

The study revealed that the relationships between parent governors and principals are in large part influenced by the perceptions these parties hold about each other. It was argued that principals' perceptions of parent governors would determine the manner in which they (principals) support, facilitate, block or shape the nature and function of parent governor participation in their schools (cf paragraph 2.2).

The following are the principals' perceptions of parent governors according to the literature study as well as the empirical investigation.

4.2.2.1 Parent governors are suspicious partners in school governance

Some principals claimed that it was difficult to develop a relationship of trust with parent governors because these parents were always suspicious of the principals' actions. Parent governors in some of the rural schools could not accept explanations from principals, without seeking second opinion from outsiders. Lack of trust between principals and parent governors manifested itself as a serious barrier to participative school governance. Although the South African Schools Act emphasises the importance of collaboration between parent governors and principals, the problem of suspicion and mistrust still remained. Even in the best examples of school governance, it was clear that the mutual suspicion between parent governors and principals continued. Beneath the surface of well intended meetings lied misunderstanding and indifference.

4.2.2.2 Parent governors are conservative

Some principals felt that the new governing bodies would act as a brake on schools, with the stereotype of the parent governors who believed that their children's education should be as similar to as their own as possible. Parent governors were accused of using only anecdote to support their arguments and of peddling outdated views on schools. These principals were of the opinion that parental priorities were exam results and good jobs, while educators focused more on abstract qualities such as personal and intellectual developments. Some long-established parent governors object to training. They claimed that they needed no training because they had been doing the job for many years. The parent governors' refusal to undergo training did not help them to unlearn the old habits of undemocratic school governance.

4.2.2.3 Parent governors interfere with the professional duties of principals

The study revealed that there were some principals who perceived parent governors' involvement in school management as interference. This view usually came from the principals where parent governors dealt with their duties in a dedicated manner. The more usual fear expressed by principals was that these parent governors were "poking their noses in too much" by wanting to know about every detail, and also wanting to visit at all times and in the process upsetting staff with silly and offensive questions. It became clear from the study that problems occurred when the strategic role of the school governing body was not defined with sufficient clarity. The governing body could then be left impotent, unsure of what, if any contribution it had to make, or conversely, could involve itself too closely in the day-to-day management of the schools. The parent governors' interference with principals' professional duties could be attributed to the reason that parent governors in rural areas had been unprepared to deal with serious weakness, particularly those where the leadership shown by the principals was poor.

4.2.2.4 Parent governors act as employers

Most principals were of the opinion that the active involvement of parent governors in the appointment of educators and particularly principals, was a serious threat to the development of the profession. These principals claimed that there were a number of areas where parent governors and principals might come into conflict when appointing the staff. The parent governors' ignorance of the recruitment and selection procedures made it difficult for them to appoint an appropriate candidate and this had often resulted in poor quality of education in schools.

4.3 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

In a nutshell, the main conclusion the researcher drew from the study was that most parent governors in the rural areas of the Vryheid region were still struggling to create and maintain sound working relationships with the principals. Their struggle manifested itself in the adversarial and conflictual relationships that existed between parent governors and principals, poor involvement of parent governors in the decision-making process and the lack of proper communication and consultation between parent governors and principals.

The following section deals with more specific conclusions according to the factors that influence the working relationship between parent governors and school principals.

4.3.1 Lack of human resource development strategies

The findings revealed that the South African school governors had not been adequately prepared for the changes that are taking place in the educational and political environments. As was noted by Makhokolo (1991:103), the study showed that the development of principals, parent governors and other human resources had been fragmented and unsustainable. The need for leadership development of school governors had always existed during this transformation period especially because

school governors had previously been conditioned to function under undemocratic situations.

Some schools governing bodies who do not have the managerial know-how to govern schools effectively may find it difficult to create and maintain sound relationships with other role-players. This often leads to insecurity, uncertainty, low self-esteem and lack of innovative practices in the school governance. This has often resulted in resistance, negative perceptions and harmful attitudes towards the whole institution of participative school governance.

4.3.2 Attitudes

Negative and harmful attitudes towards parent governors in schools remain a critical barrier to participative school governance. Discriminatory attitudes resulting from prejudice against parent governors on the basis of historical background, political affiliation, ethnicity, low level of education and other characteristics manifest themselves as barriers to parent governors' participation in decision-making when such attitudes are directed towards school governing body members.

For the most part, negative attitudes towards school governing bodies manifest themselves in the labeling of school governing body members. Sometimes these labels are merely negative associations between the principal and some individual parent governor, and the most serious consequence of such labeling results when it is linked to the formation of negative perceptions of school governing bodies overall. The empirical investigation indicated that the principals' negative attitudes have often resulted in the exclusion of parent governors from decision-making regarding curriculum matters. This has also perpetuated the failure of the school governance system to change or adapt to meet the particular needs of the parent governors. The negative attitudes, assumptions and misconceptions about school governing bodies have undermined the formation of positive perceptions regarding parent governors within the school governance system.

4.3.3 Power-play

Power-play has been defined as a challenge to authority by subordinates (Mosoge 1993:20). The findings of this study indicated that principals and parent governors, particularly the chairperson, act to enhance their own position, regardless of the cost to the school or to others, and the acquisition of power is the central aim.

The empirical investigation revealed that parent governors are now involved in what was previously perceived as the sole jurisdiction of principals whereas there are principals who do not want to relinquish their power. The struggle for power that characterises the relationship between principals and parent governors might have resulted in the formation of negative perceptions of school governing bodies in the rural areas of the Vryheid region.

4.3.4 Hidden Agenda

Mosoge (1993:20) has pointed out that the hidden agenda is characterised by a lack of communication between the people involved, with the less powerful persons tending to feel anger, fear, frustration and insecurity. This was reflected to some extent in the findings of this study. The barriers resulting from fear and lack of communication might have arisen from the perception of principals themselves. For example, parent governors who are competent and confident might be regarded as threats, and thus be isolated. One of the most serious barriers to parent governors' participation in decision-making can be found within the school governance system itself and relates primarily to the inflexible and conservative nature of the school management which prevents it from meeting the diverse needs among parent governors. The empirical investigation indicated that most principals would like to involve parent governors in decision making. However, the principals' views with regard to power-sharing varied depending on their personal power and control. It is therefore probable that those principals who thought they had limited power would be less willing to share power with school governing

bodies members and this might have resulted in the formation of negative perceptions of school governing bodies.

4.3.5 Role confusion

Most principals worry that too much power has been put in the hands of governors who do not understand what their role is. These principals claim that parent governors are ignorant of what principals do, and of the conditions they work in, whereas on the other hand the parent governors accuse the principals of ignorance about what governing bodies do. Some principals might have neutralised school governance by a deliberate failure to define specific areas of responsibility for lay school governors. The outcome would be the overarching control of rural schools from 'above' by the local education authorities and their officers, and from 'below' by their principals and other professional staff. The vague definition of duties and responsibilities of school governing bodies has often left the power in rural schools very much in the hands of the principal. The findings revealed that many principals in rural schools do still seem to dominate their governing bodies. They make a greater input than the rest of the governors put together, they often control the agenda, they may even choose the membership. Their knowledge and expertise gives them a more important platform than any other single governor.

4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the findings of the study and described the conclusions that were drawn. The findings indicated that principals are in the first-order position to facilitate, support, block or shape the involvement and functioning of governing body members in their schools. It was discovered that principals' perceptions of school governing bodies play a role in either inclusion or exclusion of school governing body members. Moreover, it was shown that school governing body involvement is not something which happens by chance but should be purposeful and planned.

The next and last chapter makes a synthesis of these findings, including the summary of the entire study project. The attempt is then made, through a collation of responses to all the individual aspects of the study, to each specific conclusion as the basis also for offering a set of practical recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to give a summary of the study as a whole and to make certain recommendations. Attempts were made to collate responses to individual aspects, so as to arrive at specific conclusions, followed by a set of recommendations which it is hoped may alleviate the problems identified.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

Throughout the study, the emphasis was on the parent governors' as well as principals' perceptions of the school governing bodies in the rural areas of the Vryheid region. The interest in this study arose from the fact that while the South African Schools Act of 1996 requires the active participation of parents, educators, learners, workers and other members of the community, parents in the rural areas seemed reluctant to make full use of this opportunity. Many governing bodies in these areas seemed most concerned with a supportive, even deferential, role and some of them only wanted to work well with the principal and staff.

The purpose of this study has not been to place blame but, rather to explore the nature of the parent governor – principal relationship as it pertains to partnership, with the hope that through improved understanding there will be an increased involvement of ordinary people in decision-making about their schools.

Chapter 1 revealed that with the passing of the South African Schools Act in 1996, the governance of schools was to be restructured in keeping with the principles of democracy to ensure representation, participation and ownership by all stakeholders within the school community. For the first time in their history, school governing bodies have a

range of duties set down for them by the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996. There are a number of areas here that are new. School governing bodies now carry the legal responsibility for a number of activities within the school:

- for accountability to parents
- for all financial matters
- for employment of staff
- for discipline of learners
- for the use and maintenance of the buildings

While there is evidence to show that some principals in the rural areas are slow in sharing these burdens (cf question 12), the ultimate responsibility lay predominantly with the parent governors. Hence the actuality of this study was to determine the extent to which the principals are prepared to involve parent governors in decision-making, and how that involvement could be expanded for the sake of effective teaching and efficient learning. The researcher concluded that there was a strong need for parent-governors to be involved in the school governance system on a productive scale (cf paragraph 4.2.1).

In chapter 2 the researcher examined the broader historico-theoretical framework of community involvement, namely, the involvement of the state, the parents, the teachers and learners in formal education, so as to realise educational objectives with all the pillars of the community fully participating in the educational process of all the children within the community. The author then discussed the role and responsibility of each component of the school governing body striving for effective teaching and efficient learning (cf paragraph 2.3).

Examples from the past educational era were cited, so as to highlight the fact that educational problems of the past do, in a way, still persist in the current educational era (cf paragraph 2.3). In addition, a descriptive survey of community involvement in schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal was presented. This province was chosen first and foremost because the Vryheid region, which is demarcated as the field of study in this

research, forms part of the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department. Secondly, Vryheid region, as compared to other regions in the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department, is under-developed with a number of schools built on farms and populated with either illiterate or semi-illiterate communities. Thirdly, the province of KwaZulu-Natal inherited, from the former government, five different education departments which were structured along racial lines. A descriptive survey was, therefore, more meaningful and fair. Lastly, there are requirements in the South African Schools Act which demand a degree of management and governance sophistication which is not common in most rural school communities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal – exactly the problem under investigation in this study (cf paragraph 1.2).

The study revealed that governance structures in the province of KwaZulu-Natal were fraught with a plethora of inadequacies and problems, particularly among the former DET, KDEC and, to a lesser extent, HoR and HoD schools. Local communities of these schools demanded equity and redress. They complained about administrative inefficiency; were critical of the poor quality of education in many schools; and showed dissatisfaction with the classification of schools into so many categories, for example, state, state-aided, community and farm schools. Above all, they railed against the weakness and illegitimacy of existent governance structures. These problems led to demands for transformation, and the establishment of PTAs and PTSAs during the 1980s should be seen within the context of these demands.

PTSAs found in secondary schools were representative governance structures consisting of parents, teachers and students. PTAs, which comprised parents and teachers, were found in some primary schools. Parent representatives were drawn from the parents of students, guardians of students, and from other community members or community organisations that had a personal stake in education or a particular school. School principals were sometimes involved in an ex-officio capacity, sometimes they acted as chairpersons and often they were excluded altogether. Their exclusion may be attributed to the fact that principals hold visible positions of leadership within the educational

management. Their position as implementors of the state policy had been criticised by some parents and community members.

The rationale behind the establishment of PTSAs was a desire to shift the balance of power away from the customary school committees and management councils to parents, teachers and students. PTSAs had many strengths and weaknesses that made organisation and operation problematic. In some instances, they functioned as crisis committees. However, this study revealed that the establishment of these representative bodies provided the concept and context for the creation of the present school governing bodies (cf paragraph 2.3).

In chapter 3 a description was given of the empirical investigation (cf paragraph 3.3). Semi-structured interviews for both the parent governors and principals were designed to assess their impressions and perceptions regarding the role of school governing bodies in the rural areas of the Vryheid region. Fifteen parent governors and fifteen principals from the rural, previously disadvantaged schools in the Vryheid region were interviewed. The results were analysed by the researcher and a test-helper (cf paragraph 3.5). The findings were discussed in chapter 3.

The researcher concluded that parent governors and principals were positively inclined to co-operate in the provision of education to children. Both the parent governors and principals perceived the school governing body to be an important school governance structure even though many of these participants are still struggling with the concept of democratic school governance. The study revealed that there are principals who are still conservative, and who perceive the increased involvement of parent governors in school affairs, particularly in curriculum matters, as interference (cf paragraph 4.2.3.3). Furthermore, the survey confirmed a serious lack of consultation between these principals and the parent governors.

The empirical survey showed that the majority of parent governors in these rural schools are either illiterate or semi-illiterate. It was seen that this constitutes a problem when it

comes to training because most parent governors cannot read and interpret written information. In most instances they rely on the interpreter who may be less concerned about their particular needs and environment. For example, because of travelling difficulties, most departmental training programmes are done at school level and are conducted by school principals. This makes it probable that some conservative principals may hide crucial information which they perceive to be challenging their power.

Chapter 4 discussed the findings of the study and described which conclusions were drawn. The survey indicated that the incorporation of the parent governors into the school system, and particularly into the school governance system, has not been a smooth and harmonious process (cf paragraph 4.2.2.1), despite the fact that the actual establishment of school governing bodies took place without problems.

It was indicated that negative and harmful attitudes towards parent governor involvement in the schools remain a critical barrier to the development of education as well as to the democratic school governance system (cf paragraph 4.2.2). The study revealed that the South African school principals were conditioned to operate in undemocratic situations. This might have made it difficult for these principals to use their own discretion in the implementation of educational policies. Such conditioning also placed strict limits on the autonomy of school administrators, and this accounts for most principals' inflexibility when it comes to involving parent governors democratically in decision-making.

Chapter 4 focused in particular on the factors which influence the working relationship between parent governors and principals in the rural schools. These factors include, *inter alia*, lack of human resource development strategies; power-play; and role confusion (cf paragraph 4.3). The researcher concluded that if the school governance system is to promote effective consultation, it is imperative that proper structures for democratic school governance are developed by all the stakeholders. Such structures have to develop the capacity of the school governance system to overcome barriers which may arise, prevent barriers from occurring and promote the development of an effective teaching and learning environment.

Chapter 5 deals with a review of the entire study project; it gives a summary of the study, so as to highlight the major findings of the study project. It also provides a set of recommendations, which, it is hoped, may help alleviate the problems identified.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 The State

The acts, regulations, legislation, *et cetera*, which are promulgated by the political party in power have major implications for the educational manager and the way schools are managed. In South Africa the educational management situation of school principals, particularly rural school principals, has remained virtually unchanged in the wake of the educational and political reform (cf paragraph 2.2). Since the State has a central responsibility in the provision of education and training, it has direct implications for the structure of the education system. The State also strongly influences the control and administration of the education system at all levels, and exerts a direct effect on the contents of education and its objectives, methods and character.

5.3.1.1 What ought to be done by the State?

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the South African Schools Act does not operate in a vacuum, but there are factors which influence it directly. In South Africa, the community members' desire for democratic participation in educational activities should have influenced the State to fulfill its role as a third party. The establishment of school governing bodies indicates that the State can no longer be responsible for the administration of education at a centralised level.

Although the South African Schools Act provides for the involvement of all stakeholders in decision-making, it is still important for the government to create rules that would ensure an orderly pattern of interaction within the school governance system. The State

should create rules which would be responsible for the regulation of interaction between the principals and parent governors and they should exist so as to balance the needs of these parties in such a way that optimal satisfaction is achieved. Since the State has committed itself to the protection of interests and rights of parents, it has to give prominence to parent governor involvement in the governance of schools, both as a fundamental human right and as the main prerequisite for the country's democratic development.

5.3.1.2 Aspects to be considered by the State with regard to the transformation of school governance

(a) Transformation : Developing an integrated system

The State initiatives at national, provincial and school level that are spearheading transformation in school governance should include issues pertaining to diversity and addressing barriers to participative school governance. The foundation for inclusive school governance should be formed at school level. Particular attention needs to be given to integrated settings and participatory governance where all stakeholders in a school can work together and where adequate training and development can start.

(b) Capacity building

There is a need to ensure true participatory democracy in the development and transformation of the schooling system by actively involving governing bodies in the implementation of the South African Schools Act. It is imperative to build organs of people's power and civil society to ensure that all school governing bodies have the capacity to interact democratically and interface government on matters of transformation in the schooling system.

The study identified the need for building the capacity of governing bodies in the rural schools and equipping them with the basic education, knowledge and skills that would enable them to function effectively. Problems centering on role-misunderstanding and misinterpretation of functions are worsened by the need to persuade less confident

parents to become involved and to lead parents away from their dependency on a strong and articulate individual in the person of a principal.

Intervention strategies are building the capacity of school governing bodies, lessening schools' dependency on principals, empowering them to assume ownership of their schools, and providing them with skills to manage governance matters independently. However, given the periodic change in governing body membership brought about by elections, it is likely that school governing bodies will always need capacity building to enable them to fulfill their roles of good governance and true stewardship.

(c) Barrier-free physical and psycho-social environment

Safe environments in which principals and school governing body members can perform their duties and activities are particularly important, especially in the light of the current political violence in KwaZulu-Natal. The provincial education department authorities play a particularly important role in principal-parent interaction. Any form of intimidation, from either party, should be discouraged. This means that rules and regulations related to intimidation-free environments should be enforced. In order to ensure barrier-free physical and psycho-social environments, the provincial education department should make provision for a safe and supportive environment where principals and other school governors are motivated and supported in their work, where all governors feel a sense of belonging and are able to engage in the decision-making process without fear of outside interference, and where all governing body members are valued and involved in the life of the learning community.

(d) Education management

The school principals have a particularly important role to play in fostering good relations between the school, the school governing body members and the world outside. As official representatives of the Education Department, principals should endeavour to ensure that the schools are orderly and properly governed. School principals should involve governors in schools and see that schools avail themselves of all that the school governing body members can contribute.

To do this, principals should establish good public relations. It is essential that all training and development programmes for governing bodies and for the school management in general incorporate skills development for accommodating and responding to diversity and addressing barriers to parent governor involvement. The development of leadership in the area of addressing barriers to parent governor involvement should be a further important priority in school management development. This is particularly important in the light of the challenges facing principals at present as they develop participative governance in their schools.

With these considerations in mind, the following is proposed:

- The National Institute for Education Management Development should commission research to develop guidelines for the involvement of parent-governors in the school governance system as well as in addressing barriers to all school governance and development programmes.
- Education Support Services should be developed to ensure that the school governance system is continuously transformed to address the issues of democratic, participative school governance.
- School governors should be involved as strategic partners with school management in aligning training programmes with school needs through systematic analysis of skills and knowledge needed to achieve school objectives.

5.3.2 The role of school principals

The findings indicated that very little in the South African school principals' background or training prepared them for the kind of democratic politics where they have to engage with other stakeholders, take stands, resolve conflict and negotiate differences (cf paragraph 2.6). The literature survey indicated that schools are to some extent stuck with their past, with their reputation, the kind of people or staff they hired years ago, their site and traditions (cf paragraph 2.3). These things take years if not decades to change. For

example, the principals who are accustomed to a power culture with a strong control figure will find it very hard to adjust to the more participative task culture even if they claim that this is what they want. This kind of ambivalence undermines the sense of empowerment that seems to be essential for effective participation of school governors.

It should be the duty and responsibility of school principals to orientate school governors on the formalities of negotiation. Since the principals are expected to be transformational leaders, they have the responsibility to pursue the values of freedom, justice, equality and democracy, and they have to give prominence to consultative school governance, both as a fundamental human right and as one of the prerequisites for the country's democratic development. A number of improvements and changes should be implemented within the organisational structures of the school governing bodies in order to raise the quality of their involvement in the governance of schools.

These improvements and changes should include the following:

- Principals should keep themselves free from political controversy and interference. This is especially true in KwaZulu-Natal where political violence is engulfing certain areas. Negative perceptions and barriers resulting from political controversy and interference would be minimised. Furthermore, school governors would be able to operate freely without fear of being labelled and perceived as agents of political parties.
- Principals should move away from the adversarial stance that has characterised the traditional relationship between parents and teachers. It is only in the spirit of co-operation that school-governor involvement can work. Principals should ensure that the development of consultative governance in schools is not hampered by the adversarial relationships which may occur at any level of school governance.
- Better education of the nation's children should be the goal of principals and school-governors. To that end, school governor involvement in schools should continue to be

an integral part of that process, but it should not be viewed as a quick fix to the problems in the school governance systems.

- Principals should ensure that all school governing body members enjoy equal rights and the protection of human dignity. Principals should work towards the establishment of a culture of tolerance which would be exemplary to the younger generation. They should contribute to the development of a school governance system that would promote education for all.
- For school governor involvement to be meaningful, it must occur between people who view themselves as equals. Principals should in no way allow a situation where other members of the governing body approach school governance with a patronising aim and communicate a view of themselves as superior.

In conclusion, it is recommended that school governor involvement in the governance of schools should not be a sporadic event, but should be carefully planned, organised and coordinated by principals together with school governing body members, who should take it upon themselves to manage school governor involvement. School governor involvement should be an on-going process, included in the school policy. The school policy should therefore reflect procedures in which school governors would be made to contribute to the smooth functioning of the school. Consequently, principals and school governors have to know that all members should become actively involved and have a say in the governance and management of their school and in this way school governance system will demonstrate acceptance of the principle of democratic equality in all of its practices.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The study indicated that there are many signs that governing bodies have the potential to achieve the hopes of the idealistic model. But many of the traditional constraints are still there, and much of the fundamental practice of governing bodies needs to change if they are to fulfil that promise.

School governors must not be so detached that they do not know what is going on in the school. They must be sufficiently inside the school to be party to its success or failure. However, they must not be so totally incorporated into the institution of the school that they lose their critical distance, but they have a legal duty to know the extent to which the school is carrying out the plans that the governing body has agreed.

This study recommends that both the principals and governing bodies have to negotiate their roles and positions in order to carry out their responsibilities in a spirit of accountability to the learners, the teachers, and the parents and communities served by the schools in which they work. The school governance system would have to allow for the active participation of school governing bodies, while at the same time providing for the needs of all interested parties. The school governance system should be based on respect for human dignity, freedom, equality and justice for all. It should be truly democratised. The principals should be willing to cede their traditional decision-making authority. They should not feel threatened by the increased governing body participation in decision-making. In fact, principals should be the facilitators of governing body involvement in the governance of schools. Eventually, the school governance system will be determined by all the social structures with an interest in education. This also means that the school management practices will be in line with the democratic principles of the country.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

One of the shortcomings of this study is the fact that it was confined to school governing bodies and principals in the rural schools of the Vryheid region only. In general, a study of school governing bodies in the entire Republic of South Africa or at least representative of numerous regions, would prove more reliable. However, the scope of this study had to be limited, and it is possible that the results could provide important pointers for the entire school governance system in the country. In particular, it would be of value to investigate the school governing bodies with regard, among other things, to their role and responsibility in the selection, appointment and dismissal of the staff of their schools. Such an investigation would prove beneficial to the school governance system country-wide.

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APPENDIX A

P.O.Box 67
Coronation
3107
15 August 2001

The Chairperson/Principal

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REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA

I hereby kindly request for your permission to collect data from members of the School Governing Body in your school.

The research is mainly concerned with the contribution of parent governors and the principal in the functioning of the SGB.

The study is performed as part fulfilment for my M PHIL degree in Education Policy Studies at the University of Stellenbosch. This study will contribute to the improvement of school governance system in the Vryheid region as well as in the whole Province.

I hope you and your team will realise the importance of this investigation and allow me to uncover school governors' perceptions of SGBs.

Thank you

D.M.Ntshangase

APPENDIX B

Interview guideline for school visits

Section One : Parent governors

1. Has the new governing body been established in accordance with departmental instructions?
2. How do you see the difference between the role of the previous school committees and the new school governing bodies?
3. What do you see as the difference between the role of the principal and the chairperson?
4. Do you see yourself as one group or as separate groups on school governing body?
5. Of which aspects of school governance do you feel you have little knowledge?
6. What do you perceive as the role of the school governing bodies?
7. What kind of help would you like to receive?
8. How do you think that help must come from?
9. How often do you report back to your constituents?
10. How do you perceive your relationship with the principal?

SECTION TWO

Interview guidelines for school visits

Interview at school : Principals

Name of school

11. What are your views regarding parent representation on the governing body?
12. What should be the role of parent governors regarding curriculum matters?

13. How do you perceive your role as an ex-officer member of the school governing body?
14. The following are the suggestions on how you might like to see parental involvement implemented in your school. Study all eight suggestions and then rank them in order of importance from 1-8.

	Number and percentage of respondents who allotted a rating of 1 or 2
Suggestions	Order of importance
1. Parents have say in the development and monitoring of the curriculum.	
2. Parents select and appoint principals, educators and other staff.	
3. Parents help the principal, educators and other staff performs their professional functions.	
4. Parents control the use of premises outside the school day, and have a policy for community use of buildings.	
5. Parents inspect and monitor the quality of the education, providing school with the information they need to improve.	
6. Parents buy textbooks, educational material or equipment for the school.	
7. Parents to question, challenge, become involved and make decisions in the best interest of the children.	
8. Parents act as teachers-assistants in classroom situations e.g. supervising, reading lessons, arts, technology and so on.	